

# Trump's Lebanon gamble could undermine effort against Iran

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 26.04.2026

The restrictions imposed on IDF activity in Lebanon and the halt to strikes in Beirut are allowing Hezbollah to continue violating the ceasefire without fearing that the price it will pay will be unbearable. They leave the Lebanese terrorist organization in control of the location, timing, frequency and means by which it clashes with Israel, as well as control over the intensity of the escalation. In practice, this also gives Hezbollah the ability to set new rules and shape the equations of response against Israel.

President Donald Trump sought to restrain Israel in order to pave the way for diplomatic dialogue between Jerusalem and President Joseph Aoun's government. In practice, he has denied Israel part of the freedom of action it had until two months ago and allowed it to continue operating with one hand tied behind its back.

In the US president's view, a process that leads to a diplomatic agreement could push Hezbollah into a corner, strip it of legitimacy to continue fighting and thereby weaken its grip on Lebanon. In Washington, as in Riyadh, the belief is that a US agreement with Iran, together with an Israeli-Lebanese agreement, would force Hezbollah to stop fighting and perhaps even place its heavy weapons under international supervision. Happy is he who believes.

Given Lebanon's complex reality, Trump may discover that the restraint he imposed actually serves Hezbollah, the main opponent of the diplomatic process and the primary proxy arm of the Iranian enemy.

## Disproportionate response

Too many players, domestic and foreign, are stirring the Lebanese pot. It is difficult to untangle the web of tensions, and there is no point in delving into its depths. The main question that should guide Israel's policy is how to remove the security threat posed to it by Hezbollah. If Gen. Aoun were capable of providing that, perhaps there would be room to discuss the price with him. But he comes to the negotiations with a different expectation: to stop Israel's military activity and

establish a process that will lead to the IDF's withdrawal and restrict Israeli activity in his country.

Aoun and his people would indeed like to see Hezbollah disarmed, but even they do not pretend to present this as a realistic goal they can achieve on their own, and they have no intention of entering confrontations that would return Lebanon to the era of car bombs and civil war. When these are the starting assumptions for the talks, Israel should not pay the price.

It is possible that Israel had no choice but to accept Trump's invitation to negotiations. We have tried the ceasefire that was required in exchange. The task of Israel's political echelon now is to convince Trump that the chances of weakening Hezbollah through diplomatic means are slim.

It must make clear that the restrictions on Israel's activity in Lebanon not only fail to strengthen Aoun's government against Hezbollah, but also entrench Iran's grip on this arena and encourage the regime in Tehran, contrary to the Americans' clear interest.

Israel should not play by the rules Hezbollah sets. Nor should it play by Gen. Aoun's rules. Its responses to ceasefire violations should be disproportionate in order to shake Hezbollah's basic assumptions as it plans operations against us.

## **Hamas digs in**

Almost a month has passed since the Peace Council, headed by Nikolay Mladenov, delivered to Hamas its proposal for a process to disarm the terrorist organization. Hamas leaders said they were holding in-depth consultations on the matter. They have yet to deliver their official position. In the meantime, they have sufficed with a list of Israeli violations and a demand that Israel fulfill all its obligations as a condition for any further move.

There is no need to wait with bated breath for the official answer. Hamas spokespeople have repeatedly stated their position rejecting any compromise on the issue of weapons. On the mediators' advice, they have lowered the media volume on this issue, but their position has not changed. When the final official wording arrives, it may not include the word "no," but that will be its meaning.

Last week, it was reported that in an intelligence document submitted to the

political echelon, IDF officials warned that Hamas was rebuilding significantly during the ceasefire. We did not need that to understand that this is the situation. Quite a few columns and articles on this issue, based on open-source information, have also been published in the pages of this newspaper. A large part of Hamas' moves is carried out openly and without efforts at concealment, also with the intention of making clear who the sovereign is here. If this is what is happening above ground, one can only estimate what is happening below it.

Mladenov and the Peace Council members are sincere in their efforts, but they, too, would admit that their ability to influence Hamas on the weapons issue is quite limited.

## **It is time for cunning in Gaza**

Two significant constraints shape Israeli policy in Gaza. The first is diplomatic: the commitment to the 20-point plan and the desire not to be seen as having torpedoed Trump's initiative. The second constraint is resources. The Gaza Strip is a secondary arena. The opportunity vis-a-vis Iran requires placing it at the center of efforts and not allowing any other arena to divert attention and focus from it. Nevertheless, the impression is that there remains considerable room for action by our forces within existing resources and without undermining the diplomatic understandings.

This is not only about efforts to thwart smuggling and weapons production and to strike Hamas' takeover of resources intended for Gaza's population. It can be assumed that one possibility will also be low-profile initiated operations, including strikes on operatives, infrastructure, weapons stockpiles, tunnels, governing facilities and the like. Such operations, carried out with the resources available to the Shin Bet security agency and Southern Command, would force Hamas to invest in defending its assets instead of rebuilding or attacking our forces. The cunning operations attributed to the Mossad in other arenas can serve as inspiration for the type of activity needed in Gaza. Without that, terrorist attacks and assaults by this enemy against us are only a matter of time.

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